



Office of Representative Heath Shuler

Representing North Carolina's Eleventh Congressional District

For Immediate Release

June 15, 2007

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Rep. Shuler Stands Behind U.S. Veterans and Strengthens Our Military *VA Sees Largest Funding Increase in its 77 Year History*

Washington, D.C. – Representative Heath Shuler voted today to provide much needed funding for the Veteran's Administration and for the construction of military facilities, while improving accountability. The Military Construction & Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill was approved by an overwhelming bipartisan majority on a vote of 409-2.

The bill increases the VA budget by \$6.7 billion above the 2007 level, the largest single increase in the 77 year history of the Department of Veterans Affairs and \$3.8 billion above the President's request for fiscal year 2008.

"We owe a tremendous debt to the brave men and women who have served our nation in the Armed Forces. This bill ensures that veterans across Western North Carolina will receive the high-quality care they deserve in a timely manner at the Asheville VA Medical Center," said Rep. Shuler. "This bill's passage also means over 1100 new VA caseworkers can be hired to begin reducing the unacceptable delays over 400,000 veterans are facing in receiving earned benefits."

Additionally, the 2008 Military Construction & Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill will:

- Support critical maintenance of VA health care facilities.
- Make five polytrauma centers and three Centers of Excellence for Mental Health and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) fully operational this year. The centers will care for those returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.
- Support the development and operation of a toll-free telephone and web-based hotline for veterans to report on deficiencies in VA medical facilities and care.

The bill also provides resources to support military construction projects and ensure provide our military with essential training facilities, and better housing, health care and day care facilities. The legislation:

- Provides better housing and training facilities when troops return from combat through an unprecedented \$21.4 billion investment in military construction, family housing, and the Base Realignment and Closure process (BRAC).

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- Assist in growing our military forces and begins the process of adding 65,000 Army, 27,000 Marine, and 9,000 National Guard and Reserve troops.

The Military Construction & Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill also increases funding for Inspector General for VA to improve services for veterans and their families and to prevent and deter potential waste, fraud and inefficiencies.

The Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill has been endorsed by veterans groups such as the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), American Legion, Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA), American Veterans (AMVETS), and Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America among many others.

The bill is strongly supported by veterans groups because it exceeds, for the first time, the Independent Budget prepared by veterans' service organizations by \$294 million.

“Strengthening our Armed Forces and providing our veterans with the benefits they have earned are two of my highest priorities. I will continue to fight in Congress to provide our men and women in uniform the equipment and facilities they need, while honoring our veterans and ensuring they are treated with dignity and respect,” Rep. Shuler added.

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